

Is Army acting legally, O'Brien asks on layoffs

By Robert Estill
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WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. George O'Brien, R-Joliet, has asked the General Accounting Office to determine if the Army is acting legally in reported plans to lay off 130 Uniroyal employees at the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, an O'Brien aide said Thursday.

In a letter delivered Thursday to the GAO, an investigative arm of the Congress, O'Brien asked if the Army is acting "in a proper and legal manner."

He raised the question because the plans for the Joliet plant apparently exceed the 4.9 percent reduction called for in the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction law.

O'Brien was told Wednesday by an official of Uniroyal Inc., the contractor that maintains the generally mothballed plant on a standby basis, that the Army plans to lay off 115 of the 298 Uniroyal employees by mid-March as part of an effort to trim \$3.8 million from the plant's \$13.6 million budget.

O'Brien also has learned that Uniroyal has been directed by the Army to lay off an additional 15 employees by July 1, the aide said.

Army spokesmen have said the Army has asked plant operators what steps would be needed to accomplish budget reduction targets, but they insist that the Army has not made a final decision on specifically what will be cut.

Aides to both O'Brien and Sen. Alan J. Dixon, D-Ill., said the Army is not expected to announce any decisions before Monday because of the controversy surrounding the plans.

Despite the Army's contention that no decisions have been made, O'Brien plans to continue efforts to head off any personnel deductions that would exceed 4.9 percent, the O'Brien aide said.

"While (the new deficit reduction law) provides for a 4.9 percent reduction in defense spending in certain accounts, the Army has laid on reductions of more than 28 percent in the budget for the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant," O'Brien said in the letter to Comptroller General Charles A. Bowsher, head of the GAO.

"Further, the Army has proposed to lay off more than 40 percent of the workers at the Joliet arsenal and is assigning more than 16 percent of the total layoffs in the standby arsenal program to the Joliet arsenal."